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A New Pleistocene Mammal Site, Mendip Hills, Somerset

By
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The Mendip Hills are well known for their Pleistocene cave and fissure deposits, and this short communication is to acquaint the reader with a newly discovered fissure-filling which merits special attention. This new fissure is in a limestone quarry at Westbury-sub-Mendip (Nat. Grid Ref. ST506504). The deposit was first brought to my notice by Prof. E. K. Tratman who, with a team of helpers, collected the majority of the specimens and samples. This site is of special importance as it is stratified, and contains the remains of two mammal species which are new to the Mendip Pleistocene mammal fauna. The site has been entered in the records of the U.B.S.S. as locality M38.

The quarry is excavated in massive Carboniferous Limestone which dips 40° to the south-west, and the fissure is in the north-east corner of the quarry. The quarry face here is about 30 m. in height at its maximum, but the fissure can only be traced about halfway down the face as its bottom is concealed by fallen rubble. At the top, the fissure is approximately 25 m. wide but as it penetrates the rock, the width of the fissure diminishes until it has almost disappeared by the time it reaches the scree slope. The fissure also extends back behind the quarry face and can be roughly delineated by an area of slight subsidence. The deposit, especially the top portion, is stratified and the strata can be summarised thus:—

	Thickness
Soil and rubble	1·60 m.
Breccia	2·05 m.
†Small stones in a sandy matrix	2·05 m.
†Upper black layer	0·60 m.
Yellow clay	1·30 m.
†Lower black layer	0·30 m.
†Rounded pebbles in yellow sandy matrix	0·90 m.
Angular boulders cemented with calcite	1·60 m.
†Rocks in a sandy matrix	6·50 m.
Large stones in a clayey matrix	?

†Bone-bearing strata

There is a conspicuous difference between the dip of the Carboniferous strata to the left and right of the fissures; this indicates that a fault may have contributed to the size and orientation of the fissure. This fault may be associated with a thrust to the north of the quarry and which trends northeast. There is no indication of a limestone roof to the deposit.

A lot of mammalian material has been collected from the vicinity of

the fissure, but unfortunately most of this is unstratified. Seven descents have been made down over the face of the deposit, and samples have been collected at intervals which it is hoped will provide some stratified bones and teeth. A faunal list has been compiled on the basis of dentitions, as there has been little time for an intensive study of the post-cranial bones.

FAUNAL LIST

Sorex minutus Linné	Pygmy Shrew
**Mysotis nattereri* Kuhl	Natterer's Bat
Crocuta crocuta Erxleben	Cave Hyaena
**Homotherium* sp.	Scimitar Cat
**Felis leo* Linné	Lion
**Mustela* sp.	
Canis lupus Linné	Wolf
Vulpes vulpes Linné	Red Fox
**Ursus arctos* Linné	Brown Bear
**Ursus spelaeus* Rosenmuller & Heinroth	Cave Bear
**Dicerorhinus etruscus* Falconer	Etruscan Rhinoceros
**Cervus elaphus* Linné	Red Deer
Bos sp.	Ox
**Apodemus sylvaticus* Linné	Field Mouse
**Microtus arvalis* Pallas	Common Vole

* Stratified Material available.

The vole remains were found near the top of the succession, and as it is a member of a living species it could have been derived from recent deposits. The same applies to the shrew. Nearly all of the teeth identified belong to bears, of which there may be two species present. The interesting feature of this fauna is the presence of the scimitar cat and the Etruscan rhinoceros. This particular rhinoceros species is indicative of an Early Pleistocene fauna. Although the scimitar cat is present up to the Weichselian in Great Britain, the state of presentation of the single canine from the Lower Black Layer (bleached crown, black root) indicates that it is older than the other teeth in the deposit. All of the species found indicate temperate climatic conditions, and there is an absence of "cold" forms.

Dating this fauna is difficult since little of it was found "in situ" and it is not known which forms were contemporaneous. The only species with a suitably restricted range is the Etruscan rhinoceros which is found from the Villafranchian to the Elsterian. Thus the oldest deposits are not later than the Elsterian. From the faunal characteristics it appears that the earliest deposits represented in the fissure date from the Cromerian. The majority of the specimens, the bear teeth, are probably much later than this as they represent *Ursus arctos* and not *Ursus deningeri*. Although elements of an Early Pleistocene fauna are evident their scarcity indicates a limited exposure of strata of this age, and that the bulk of the fissure-filling is of a later age.

I would like to thank Prof. Tratman and his helpers for collecting most of the specimens and Dr. R. J. G. Savage for helping with identification.

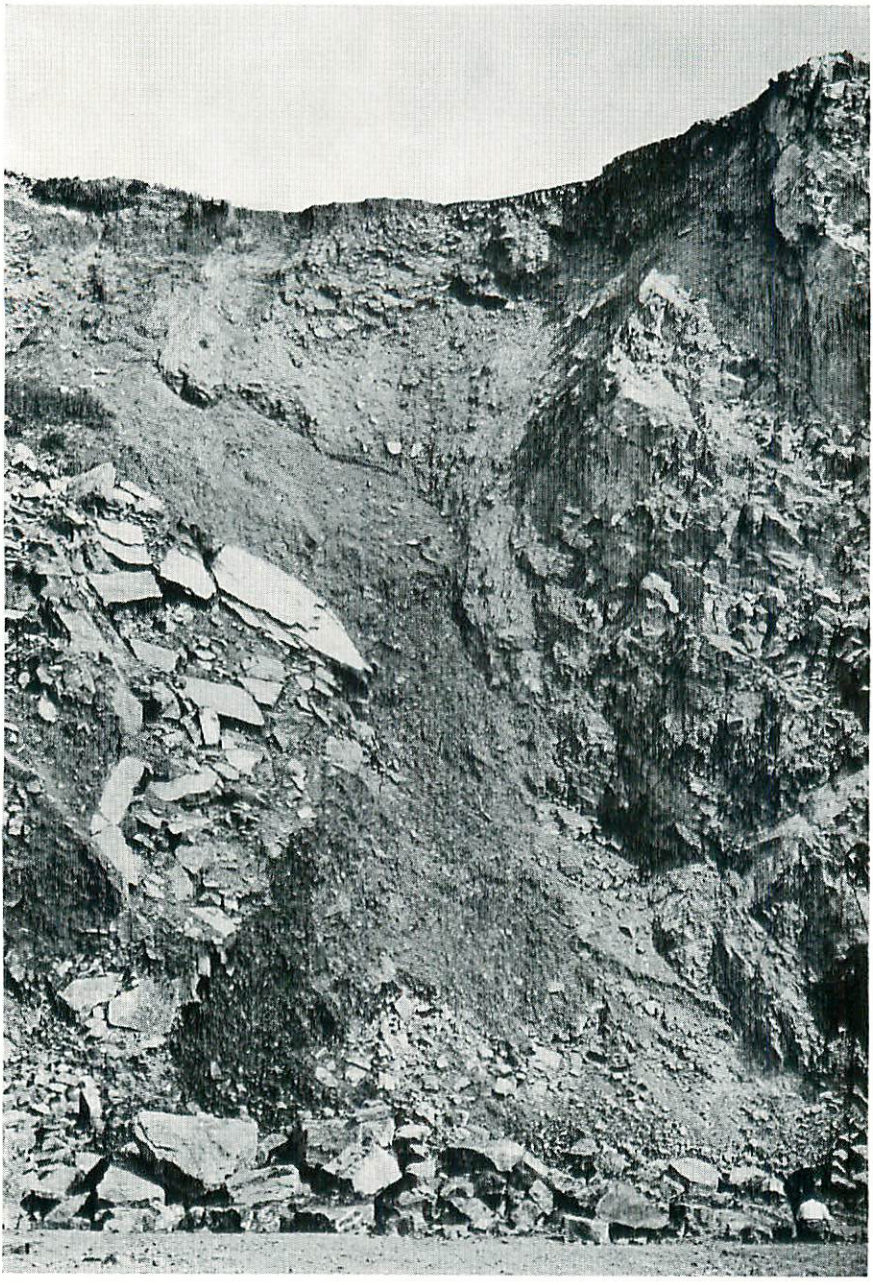

PLATE 13

View of Pleistocene fissure-filling at Westbury-sub-Mendip in its early stages. For scale note figures at bottom right.

(*Photograph: Dr. H. Taylor*)